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CAMERON

WRITINGS

PLACE AT THE TABLE, [1992]

Place @ the Table

in today's paper there's a quote from Jerry Brown which is "Take Back America".
It of course fails to realize that this slogan has been used by American Indians for
several hundred years. It's a sentiment we can get behind, but the statement also shows that

FROM MY HOUSE YOU CAN SEE THE OCEAN. TODAY THE GRAY CLOUDS
AND SKY BLENDED INTO THE GRAY SWIRLING OCEAN WHICH MELDED INTO
MY GRAY, PENSIVE MOOD. THIS MOOD DESCENDED UPON ME THIS WEEK,
SETTLING IN LIKE A FAMILIAR FRIEND. ~~UNDERNEATH IS AN ODD~~
~~DETACHMENT.~~ I PLAYED IRISH MUSIC THIS AFTERNOON BECAUSE THE
MUSIC IS APPROPRIATE TO DRIZZLE. THERE IS MELANCHOLY AND A STARK
BEAUTY TO IT. THE SUN FINALLY BROKE THROUGH THE CLOUDS SHINING ON
THE GREENESS OF SPRING, DEFIANT AGAINST THE MIST AND THE DRIZZLE.

I CAN SEE THE OCEAN BECAUSE MY HOME IS ON A HILL. MY HOME
THAT I GREW UP IN WAS ALSO ON A HILL. OUR SUNDAY DINNERS IN SOUTH
DAKOTA WERE ALWAYS AT 2 P.M., FOLLOWING MASS. WE ATTENDED MASS
EVERY SUNDAY, EVEN IN THE BLIZZARD COLD OF WINTER. THE CATHOLIC
GOD IS VERY DEMANDING. BUT AT SUNDAY DINNER, MY GRANDPARENTS
COMPLAINED ABOUT OUR PRIEST, HIS SERMON OR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.
YET EVERY SUNDAY WE WENT TO MASS, TO CONFESSION. I USED TO LIE IN
CONFESSION. I COULD NOT COME UP WITH SINS TO CONFESS SO I CREATED
THEM. OF COURSE SINCE LYING IS A SIN, I ALWAYS HAD ONE PERPETUAL
SIN TO CONFESS EVERY SUNDAY.

TODAY IN REMEMBERING SUNDAY DINNER AND MASS, I THOUGHT
HOW IT IS A METAPHOR FOR OUR QUEST FOR RECOGNITION OF OUR RIGHTS
AND LEGITIMACY. WE WANT A SEAT AT THE TABLE. BUT SOME OF US
HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT WHAT THIS MEANS. IT ALMOST DOES NOT MATTER
TO HAVE A PLACE AT THE TABLE IF NOTHING ELSE CHANGES. OUR PLACE
AT THE TABLE SIMPLY CANNOT ONLY MEAN THAT AN OUT LESBIAN OR GAY
MAN IS SITTING SOMEWHERE WITH POWER. IT CAN NOT AND SHOULD NOT
BE THAT SIMPLE.

OUR COMMUNITY IS COMPLEX. A PLACE AT THE TABLE RAISES THE
QUESTION OF WHO REPRESENTS US AND WHAT ISSUES GET RAISED. CAN
THE COMMUNITY TRUST THAT MARLON RIGGS, PAT NORMAN, MING-YEUNG
LU, CARMEN VAZQUEZ OR I CAN REPRESENT ALL OF US AT THE TABLE? WHO
HAS THE RIGHT TO REPRESENT US? as the community. At the

very least it should be persons who
are willing to be accountable
to our communities that are
LESBIAN GAY & BISEXUAL.

Democracy
hasn't had
anything new
to offer us
quite as
and a while.
certainly
nothing
really
significant

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SOME OF US AS ACTIVISTS CRY "ASSIMILATIONIST" OR USE OTHER PERJORATIVE WORDS TO DESCRIBE OTHER ACTIVISTS IF WE BELIEVE THEY DO NOT ACT CONSISTENT WITH OUR VERSION OF THE MOVEMENT. OR WE CALL THEM OBSTRUCTIONIST OR IMMATURE IF THEY DO NOT WANT TO BE ON THE INSIDE OF THE STRUCTURE AS IT EXISTS. AND SOME OF US TRULY DO NOT FIT IN ANYWHERE.

ONCE AT THE TABLE, DO WE DARE CHALLENGE THE HOUSE, THE STRUCTURE THAT SURROUNDS THE TABLE, OR IS IT ONLY THE GOAL TO BE PART OF THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS? WE WANT TO BE FREE TO BE IN THE ARMED SERVICES, BUT IS IT ENOUGH TO HAVE GAY OR LESBIAN GENERALS? OR COULD WE NOT ADD A DIFFERENT SENSIBILITY TO THE VERY NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE ARMED SERVICES? WE WANT TO BE REPRESENTED AS WE TRULY ARE IN THE MOVIES, BUT WHAT KIND OF MOVIES DO WE WANT TO BE IN? WILL OUR HISTORY BE REWRITTEN LIKE THAT OF THE BLACK CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS IN 'MISSISSIPPI BURNING'?

I BELIEVE THE SENTIMENT OF OUR 'PLACE AT THE TABLE' NEEDS TO BEGIN TO BE SHAPED IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY. WE NEED TO QUESTION THE STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS IN WHICH WE WISH TO PLAY A PART, IF THAT PART IS TO BE MORE THAN TOKEN. THE STRUGGLE TO ARRIVE AT THE TABLE CANNOT OVERSHADOW THE CRITICAL ROLE OF EXAMINATION THAT WE HAVE AS RECENT, OR STILL, OUTSIDERS. THE QUESTIONING IS OUR HARD WORK, OUR HOMEWORK, TO ENABLE US TO ARRIVE AT THE TABLE WITH A REAL, WELL-THOUGHT OUT ARTICULATION OF OUR ISSUES, NOT FACILE RHETORIC. (THE LATTER IS LIKE MAKING THINGS UP FOR CONFESSION: THE FORM OVERWHELMS THE SUBSTANCE.)

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